Material on tobacco and health was given the author of this article.

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SMOKING DISPUTED AS CANCER CAUSE

Tobacco Industry Claims Charges Against Cigarettes in Lung Cases Are Not Proven

This is the 15th of 16 articles on cancer, presenting a summary of current techniques in treatment and prevention of the disease.

BY HARRY NELSON, Times Medical Editor

Is smoking a factor in lung cancer, the leading cause of cancer death in men?

Yes, says the American Cancer Society.

But the tobacco industry, which has put up nearly $3.5 million for research into tobacco and health by independent scientists, points out that the ACS assertion has not been proved and rests entirely on statistical evidence.

Therefore, it concludes the Tobacco Industry Research Committee—as well as many medical men who have no axes to grind — no one can say with scientific conviction that smoking is a causative factor in lung cancer.

Rapid Rise Noted

According to ACS, lung cancer incidence has increased eight-fold in the past 20 years, the most rapid rise ever reported for a non-infectious disease. Nearly 30,000 men and approximately 5,000 women will die of lung cancer this year, the society reports.

A two-pack-a-day male cigarette smoker who has been smoking for years has about 1 in 10 chances of developing lung cancer. A less than a pack a day smoker has about 1 in 36 chances of developing the disease. The odds for a non-smoker are about 1 in 270.

These ACS figures are based entirely on statistical evidence gathered in studies of the smoking habits of thousands of victims of lung cancer. They are not based on any clinical or laboratory evidence which proved that smoking was the cause of the disease.

The statistical relationship has been strong enough, however, to prompt the surgeon general of the United States to declare: "The Public Health Service feels the weight of the evidence is increasingly pointing in one direction: that excessive smoking is one of the causative factors in lung cancer."

It has also caused the British government to launch an educational campaign warning of the danger of cigarette smoking.

Emphasis on Future

And here in California such evidence has been instrumental in a renewed attempt to incorporate in school curriculums an educational program on smoking.

"Educating adults in the dangers of smoking is doomed to failure," a spokesman for the Los Angeles County branch of ACS told The Times.

"The emphasis must be on the future—on the education of our children. Such a course should be a simple presentation of facts, not a condemnation. It should be taught the same way that arithmetic is taught."

Clarence Cook Little, Sc.D., scientific director of the Tobacco Industry Research Committee, has this to say:

"The scientific world has long been cautious in accepting claims for a cure for cancer. We should be just as cautious today in accepting claims that a direct cause of cancer has been found.

"The statistical associations reported between excessive cigarette smoking and lung cancer have pointed out the need for greatly intensified research. They have not provided the answers—nor can any purely statistical association do so.

No Simple Cause

"Nonsmokers get lung cancer. The vast majority of heavy smokers never get lung cancer. Obviously, there is no simple cause and effect mechanism resulting from cigarette smoking."

Other medical men have pointed out that the epidemic like increase may be due to factors totally unrelated to cigarette consumption. These factors, they suggest, are the development of better diagnostic facilities and longevity of the population.

A Canadian researcher has found no X-ray evidence of lung cancer in northern Indians and Eskimos, almost all of whom smoke heavily. This suggests that smoking alone is not the cause of the disease.

And a Scot investigator, Dr. T. W. Lees, Law Hospital, Carluke, Scotland, has analyzed the evidence suggesting a relationship between smoking and lung cancer and concluded that smoking is no more intimately concerned with lung cancer than the increase in banana eating, cinema going and many other habits which have grown the past 50 years.

Obviously, the tobacco industry and the American Cancer Society cannot both be right.

According to Dr. Abraham M. Lilienfeld of Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health, a leading authority on cancer prevention, some sort of action must be taken if success in controlling lung cancer is to be achieved.

Action Suggested

This action, he says in a recent issue of the American Journal of Public Health, can be directed at three points: the cigarette, the smoker or the exposure of the smoker to cigarettes.

Concerning the cigarette, it may be possible to determine the cancer-causing chemical in tobacco and remove it or alter the cigarette in such a way that the cancer-causing activity is lessened.

"To achieve this objective a great deal of chemical research is in progress and perhaps in the near future this will be the major control measure," Dr. Lilienfeld says.

As for the smoker, the physician believes there are factors influencing host susceptibility to the cancer-causing activity of tobacco and this is why all heavy cigarette smokers do not develop lung cancer.

Very little is presently known about susceptibility, however. More research is needed in this area in order to learn a method for determining the susceptible state so that persons possessing it could be motivated not to take up smoking.

The third approach, trying to influence the smoking public to give up the habit and to educate teenagers not to begin smoking, also involves unknown factors. In this case the unknown factors involve human motivation.

Striking Feature

"The striking feature about these remarks is that even after we have decided that action should be taken in the field of preventive medicine we are faced with a lack of knowledge necessary for developing adequate control measures," Dr. Lilienfeld writes.

"Many basic problems in the field of cancer can only be solved by a more intensive public health research effort. It is not necessary to await the time when the biochemists and biophysicists have solved the 'riddle of the cancer cell' for the development of a sound, scientific program for cancer prevention and control."

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